

Mrs. Patey didn't expect to, but she became a pioneer in education

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"It was mostly Henry who moved that saw, but the boy held on," she said, and his success at being a good helper was a breakthrough.

They tried the boy at two summer camps, and he did well, and so the Pateys were able to gain admission for him to Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine, where he continued to progress.

The boy went on to serve in World War II in Europe and later was accepted at Brown University, with no high school diploma, graduated with high honors, is now married and has two fine sons.

The Pateys had cared for the boy for only six months, with remarkable results.

"Everybody who knew about him was absolutely astonished. After that, we had psychiatrists and psychologists knocking at our door. There was no end," said Mrs. Patey.

In fact, it was just the beginning, of the Hampshire Country School.

"The idea of taking these kinds of children into a small, residential school was, I think, quite innovative," said Walter R. Peterson, president of Franklin Pierce College in Rindge and former governor of New Hampshire, who was one of the school's first teachers.

Before the school was founded, such children were often permanently expelled from school or, in more tragic instances, they were consigned to the back wards of mental hospitals where, unless they were resuced, they stayed until they died.

While the Pateys carried out Henry Patey's educational theories about the therapeutic values of education, "Mrs. Patey added a lot of quiet strength to the combination," Peterson said. "His theories were kept in balance by her."

Under the "quiet strength" that Peterson saw is a doggedness that grew right out of the heartland of America.

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Mrs. Patey came to Rindge by way of New Albany, Ind., Prosser, Wash., Sitka, Alaska, New York City, Paris, and Cambridge and Wellesley, Mass.

She didn't set out to be a pioneer. She set out to be a piano teacher, a respectable career goal for a girl born in 1892.

Trim in build and precise in speech, she listens to questions carefully and then chooses her words without hesitation.

"I don't know what (my mother) expected of me," said Mrs. Patey. I never really had time to find out. I was absolutely determined from as early a time as I can remember that I wanted more than anything to have a piano to play," she said.

Adelaide Patey was the second of five children born to Eleanor and Louis Walker in New Albany. Their first child, a girl, died in infancy and their youngest child and only son died at age 4.

The Walker family had little money and certainly nothing for a piano for Adelaide. But, she recalled, "I just kept it up. I was probably the bane of my mother's existence. I wanted to have a piano to play."

Her father loved music and owned a record player and many records, "and, of course, I learned to read music in the public elementary school," she said.

"I just decided I was going to learn to play the piano, whether I had one or not, so I constructed a piano — just the keyboard — and I practiced. Of course, it was all imaginary. I sure sang along with myself, too," she said.

In the year she graduated from high school, she got hold of a catalog with pictures of pianos in it. "I had gone to a great deal of trouble to find out about all of these pictures. I showed the catalog to my father, but he just pooh-poohed it and pushed the whole thing aside.

"That was my last hope. I burst into tears. Mother came into the room and said, 'Now, Lou, this child has begged for a piano since I can remember and she did graduate from high school!'"

"Well, that was all he needed. We went through the catalog right then and there and picked out what was the best one. Then we ordered it from Chicago." It was an upright Meister piano," Mrs. Patey recalled.

After the piano arrived, she began lessons with a blind man who was choir director in their church.

"Play something," he told her at her first lesson, and he could hardly believe the music he heard. "He just couldn't get over it — that I could play the piano, yet never had had a lesson," she said.

After a few weeks, he asked her to read music for him so he could transcribe it into Braille. He'd ask her to read an anthem and play it through once for him. From then on, she earned her piano lessons by reading music for him.

One day he told her, "I'm going to teach you to teach piano, because you helped me learn new anthems in a third of the time anyone else ever did."

"That confirmed me in the thought that in the whole world, I had to become a teacher."

Her father died a year and a half after Adelaide began her piano lessons, and since she was the oldest child, she looked for work as a piano teacher to support the family, but didn't succeed.

So when her father's sister wrote that they could use a piano teacher in the town where she lived — Prosser, Wash. — and that Adelaide could stay with her, she shipped her piano and herself to the Northwest.

"But it was not an easy thing for a young girl to do," she remembered.